

Leo Alvin Gates

South Presbyterian Church

1780 SENECA STREET

BUFFALO, N. Y.
January 9, 1926.

THE REV. LEO ALVIN GATES, PASTOR
MISS EMMA POST, PASTOR'S ASSISTANT

PHONE, ABBOTT 3193

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Mr. Robert E. Speer, D.D.
156 Fifth Avenue
New York City.

RECEIVED

JAN 12 1926

Dear Dr. Speer: Mr. Speer

I fully realize how exceedingly busy you are. It is good of you to reply to my communications.

What I wrote with regard to Dr. Goodspeed's book is not now clear in my mind. I think that Chap. V. of his "Making of the N. T." has material that is pertinent to our problem. It really, at bottom, is this problem, "What is the Bible?"

I note that you are to be with us in Buffalo on the eighth of February. The addresses of that day will make big demands upon you, I know. Perhaps, however, there may be some time when, with some others, we might talk over the matters we have written about, and others that are before the Commission. It seems peculiar to me that no one has attempted a refutation of my little pamphlet. I wish that some one who takes the other side, would take up the argument on Biblical grounds. I am sure it should be approached as a historical question, not a theological or philosophical one. I trust, should we be able to meet, that I may be able to make it very clear that my interest in the question arises from my zeal to see Jesus given that supremem place in the world's life which he deserves. I fear civilization is doomed apart from his leadership; and I am strongly of the opinion that civilization will not accept a prodigy or monstrosity as leader. For the real Jesus, it waits with hungry heart.

Very sincerely yours,

Leo Alvin Gates

R. M. Kurtz

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March 14, 1924.

My dear Dr. Speer:

May I bring up again the subject of an article from you upon the Virgin Birth? You will recall that in view of what I wrote you about other material on hand you felt it was inexpedient for you to write on the subject.

When I wrote you I had in mind chiefly a manuscript we had just received from Bishop R. J. Cooke of the Methodist Church. However, since my letter to you, it has appeared inadvisable to use his article mainly because it is so very elaborate that we cannot give space to it.

Since this decision I have thought the matter over again, and feel that a paper by yourself would be more effective at this time than anything that I can lay my hands on. I wish, therefore, you could see your way clear to prepare it. As I wrote you originally, it would be well to keep it within 6000 words if you can conveniently do this. As to the time of its publication, I would prefer, if you think best, to keep it until the October number as people do not read so much in the summer as in the fall. In order to arrange that number, I ought to have the manuscript not later than the latter part of June. I like to plan the magazine sometime in advance in order to balance the material as well as possible.

Dr. White, as a rule, leaves the quarterly almost exclusively in my hands, but I spoke to him about the possibility of having you write on this subject and he very promptly and decisively approved. I am sure it will greatly please him to have you do so.

With kindest regards and appreciation, I am,

most sincerely,

Dr. Robert E. Speer,
156 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

R. M. Kurtz

RMK:LWV

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

If we believe that the Gospels are true we have no difficulty in believing in the Virgin Birth of our Lord. The Gospels unmistakably affirm that He was born of a virgin. This is the first, and for all of us who believe the Gospels, the sufficient ground for our conviction. Matthew and Luke teach the Virgin Birth as plainly and clearly and surely as they teach anything at all.

It is sometimes said that the story of the Virgin Birth is in only these two Gospels. But I do not see that that makes any difference. It is in both the Gospels which deal at all with Jesus' earthly life. The Gospels of Mark and John, after the Prologue, only begin with Jesus' public ministry as an adult man. Instead of saying, "The story is found in only two Gospels," it would be more fitting to say that "All the Gospels which deal with Jesus' childhood tell of the Virgin Birth. Furthermore, no one raises questions about teachings of Jesus because they are not found in all the Gospels. The full Sermon on the Mount is in only one Gospel. The stories of the Prodigal Son and of the Good Samaritan are in only one.

And as to the Gospel of Mark something more is to be said. It does not contain the story of the Virgin Birth. But note how it begins: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," followed by the voice from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son." There is nowhere in the Gospel any mention of Joseph. It is the only Gospel which entirely omits him. And its omission is made very significant. Mark never refers to any popular notion of Jesus as Joseph's son. He speaks of Him only as Mary's son; "Is ^{not} this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" He quotes the people's question about his brothers and sisters but not about His father. (Mark 6:3)

"But," it is said, "neither John nor Paul refer to the Virgin Birth. It cannot, therefore, be fundamental." But the present question is not how fundamental a truth it is but whether it is a truth. The fact that John and Paul did not refer to it, if this were the fact, would not prove that it was not true. Neither one of them refers to the Sermon on the Mount nor to most of the events or sayings of Jesus' life. Their silence

would not disprove the declarations of Matthew and Luke. But are we sure that they are silent?

John's Gospel begins with the loftiest assertion of the preexistence of Jesus as the Eternal Word. He never mentions the name of Mary, but his frequent references to her are characterized by a deep and peculiar reverence. On the other hand, he never mentions Joseph save twice in quoting such references to him by others as would have been the common usage. But in each of these cases John at once supplies a complete corrective of the natural popular supposition that Joseph was Jesus' father. In the first case, Philip says to Nathanael: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." But notice what follows, when Nathanael comes to Jesus. "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God." In the second case, the Jews said: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" Again, note what follows. John proceeds to quote some of Jesus' plainest words about the Divine Sonship, beginning at once with the reference to "the Father that sent me." (John 6:42-65) Furthermore, in the Gospel of Luke where there is the full story of Jesus' Virgin Birth, occurs just the same kind of statement of the popular view which John quotes, and in Luke 3:23, where Luke calls Jesus "the son (as was supposed) of Joseph," and again in Luke 4:22, where he quotes the popular word "Is not this Joseph's son?" Obviously the quotation of such a popular notion of Luke does not mean that he knew nothing of the Virgin Birth. Equally it does not mean so in the case of John, who when he speaks for himself, constantly reports words of Jesus as to His unique origin. "Ye know not whence I come," John says He told the Jews. And the reason the Jews sought to kill Him, John adds, was that He "called God His own Father."

And no language could be plainer than that used by Paul in asserting God's unique Fatherhood of Jesus. He quotes at Antioch the Second Psalm: "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee," and immediately connects His unique origin with His unique end in the Resurrection. (Acts 13:33, 34) And was not the Gospel of Luke Paul's

Gospel? And both John and Paul, - the former in the Prologue of his Gospel and the latter in the first chapter of Colossians - deal with the pre-existence of Jesus in a way that makes it utterly impossible to think of Him as originating and entering the world as an ordinary human child.

In one word, the New Testament in certain books asserts unequivocally the Virgin Birth of Our Lord and in its other books either assumes it or implies it or says nothing inconsistent with it. If the New Testament representations of Jesus, accordingly, are trustworthy, the Virgin Birth must be accepted as a fact as reliable as any other fact of life or character of the Saviour.

In the second place we believe in the Virgin Birth because it has been the Faith of the Church from the Outset. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch early in the second century, in his epistles speaks emphatically of the Virgin Birth. In his epistle to the Ephesians he writes: "Hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing, and likewise also the death of our Lord -- three mysteries of open proclamation, the which were wrought in the silence of God." In his epistle to the Smyrneans, he says: "I give glory to Jesus Christ, the God who bestowed such wisdom upon you; for I have perceived that ye are established in faith immovable....firmly persuaded as touching our Lord, that He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a Virgin, and baptized by John truly nailed up for our sakes in the flesh, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch."

Aristides of Athens in his Apology, written about the year 130, writes: "The Christians trace their descent from the Lord Jesus Christ; now He is confessed by the Holy Ghost to be the Son of the Most High God, having come down from heaven for the salvation of men, and having been born of a holy Virgin....He took flesh and appeared to men." Justin Martyr in his First Apology, written between 140 and 150, says: "We find it foretold in the Books of the Prophets of the Prophets that Jesus our Christ should

come born of a Virgin.....be crucified and should die and rise again, and go up to Heaven, and should both be and be called the 'Son of God.'" And so we might quote Irenaeus, (190), and Tertullian, (200) Clement, (190), Origen, (250).

Canon Randolph, in his little book "The Virgin Birth of Our Lord," quotes Professor Zahn of Erlangen as saying: "This (the Virgin Birth) has been an element of the Creed as far as we can trace it back; and if Ignatius can be taken as a witness, of a Baptismal Creed springing from early Apostolic times, certainly in that Creed the name of the Virgin Mary already had its place.....We may further assert that during the first four centuries of the Church, no teacher and no religious community which can be considered with any appearance of right as an heir of original Christianity, had any other notion of the beginning of the (human) life of Jesus of Nazareth....The theory of an original Christianity without the belief in Jesus the Son of God, born of the Virgin, is a fiction."

So it is a complete error to say, as some have said, that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was a late invention. It was part of the combined New Testament records and of the combined Gospel story.

In the third place, the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth is natural, right and congruous. Jesus was unique. As Bushnell demonstrated long ago, "His character forbids His possible classification with men." That such a life should be as different in its origin and its end as it was in its spirit and principle and manifestation throughout is more natural, right and congruous than that it should have had a naturalistic ending and beginning. It was a supernatural life. We believe it harmonizes best with this fact about it that it also began and ended supernaturally.

In the fourth place, the work that Christ came to do and the place which He came to fill in humanity called for this unique and miraculous origin. It is sometimes said that the Virgin Birth is not essential to the Deity of our Lord. That depends on our

conception of His Deity and of the saving work that He came to do. But He was the Saviour that He was and is, not only because of His character but also because of the whole fact of His being, which included the supernatural uniqueness of His origin and personality. Dr. Du Bose sets this forth convincingly in his great book on "The Soteriology of the New Testament."

The Bible nowhere declares that knowledge of the Virgin Birth is essential to salvation, and there is much preaching of the Gospel in the New Testament which makes no mention of it. But this is true also of other facts in the life of our Lord. The Virgin Birth is not essential in this respect, but it is essential to the fulness of the Gospel. It is a fact which is part of the Gospel record and which is part of the whole meaning and significance of the Gospel. It is as essential an element in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as the accounts of the Sermon on the Mount in those same Gospels. If they are trustworthy in their ^{account of Jesus' teaching,} they are equally trustworthy in their representation of the convictions of their writers with regard to the manner of Jesus' birth.

Lastly, we believe in the Virgin Birth of Christ because the alternative view is intolerable. If the story of the Virgin Birth is not true, then Jesus was the ~~child~~ child of Joseph and Mary prior to their marriage, or of Mary and some unknown father. Or else the whole story of Jesus' birth and infancy is The Virgin Birth is an integral and indispensable part of that story. If any one rejects it, it can only be on grounds that prevent him from keeping any of the rest of the story. And then Mary disappears altogether from the Gospel of Luke for she is mentioned there in the first two chapters. She disappears wholly from Matthew also except from the question in 13:55. And in John's Gospel her name is never mentioned at all. There is no evidence in support of the view adverse to the Virgin Birth, except on the basis of a presupposition against such a miracle. The only records which tell us anything at all of Jesus' birth and infancy tell us that He was born of the Virgin Mary. If the records are not to be accepted in this particular there is no reason for accepting any other statement which they

make, except the reason of our own subjective disposition. In that case we make the history to suit ourselves. Even so it suits some of us best to believe that the whole wonderful life is most congruous and intelligible and true when accepted as supernatural from the first beginning to the last end.